The Unitarian Christian

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CONTENTS

The Star of Our Faith
by Rev. Heinz Rettig

The Christmas Spirit
by Rev. Robert Brooks Day

What is Worship?
by Rev. Alexander P. Winston, Ph.D.

Cinema Minded
by Rev. Paul Harmon Chapman

How Christmas Came
by Rev. Carl Bihldorff

Mystery of Life
by Rev. Preston Bradley, D. D.

31452

The Fatherhood of God.
The Brotherhood of Man.
The Leadership of Jesus.
Salvation by Character.
The Progress of Mankind,
Onward and Upward forever

EDITORIAL PRAYER

Almighty Father, thou who art from everlasting to everlasting, we turn to Thee in reverence and in gratitude. Thou art the author of life, and we rejoice that Thou hast bestowed upon us that gift. We thank Thee for the coming of Christ, our Master, into the midst of human living. At this Christmas time we would turn our thoughts again to Bethlehem, to the humble stable, to the simple bed of straw in the manger, and we would look in wonder at the babe who was born there. We bow in wonder at the humility of the birth of him who is the hope of the world.

We ask of Thee, O Father, the renewal of our faith. We would live again in the spirit of him, who, coming among men, declared that he came that men might have life and might have it more abundantly. We pray for the more abundant life. We would follow in the footsteps of him who is the way, the truth, the life. We desire, in all sincerity, to renew our loyalty as his disciples. We desire to attain some measure of his faith in God's fatherhood and in human brotherhood.

At this Christmas time, do Thou, our heavenly Father, make stronger our power of choosing what we shall hear and what we shall believe. The noises of the outer world are insistent, demanding our attention. Help us to turn from their confusion and to hear the still small voice that speaks in silence. Help us, at this time, to turn our thoughts from the strife and the disorder of the world, and to believe that Thy kingdom of peace and of goodwill shall yet possess the world; that men of many races and tongues shall find in Thee our one Divine Father, and find that men are members of one human family. So shall peace and goodwill bring the divine light into human hearts.

Help us to keep serene minds as we go forth in a confused world: to keep peace in our souls though the world be torn with strife; to believe that the Christmas prophecy of good-will among men shall be fulfilled, though that fulfillment be long delayed; to hold courageously our confidence that men shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks though men now multiply their instruments of destruction. May we never falter in our endeavor to impart this faith to our fellowmen, and may we, in our own hearts, cherish goodwill to all our fellows. We make our prayer in the spirit of our Master. Amen.

The Star of Our Faith

By Rev. Heinz Rettig
Minister, First Religious Society
Newburyport, Mass.

Over nineteen hundred years ago, ing Herod sent wise men to Bethle- m in Judea, commissioning them to arch for a prophetic child, born King the Jews.

Matthew says, "And they having ard King Herod, went their way; d lo, the star, which they saw in the st, went before them till it came and ood over where the young child was. d when they saw the star, they re- iced with exceeding great joy. And ey came into the house and saw the ung child with Mary, His mother; d they fell down and worshipped im; and opening their treasures they fered unto Him gifts, gold and frank- cense and myrrh."

The wise men were seekers after Truth. Unitarians, therefore, have something in common with them. We, too, are seekers, believing in the free mind principle, the use of Reason and Tolerance. In this spirit we are broadly understanding of others almost to the point of religious sophistication. We know, for example, that many a so-called atheist or agnostic is at heart deeply religious, often more so than those who are "religious" in reputation only. We know that often a thwarted childhood mysticism or exposure to an excess of religiosity has made many the spiteful claimants of the title, "atheist."

Unitarians are more inclusive than the orthodox minister who prayed, "Lord, we thank Thee for being with us this morning, and pray that Thou wilt look with mercy upon those churches where Thy feet have not yet trod." We look sympathetically even upon the Sunday morning golfer who says, "God is everywhere. I can worship Him just as well out on the golf links as in church." To which we reply, "Yes, you can. But the chances are you'll just play golf."

We are very theologically minded, preferring the evidence of deeds to the vagaries of pious promises. We smile upon the futile debates of the ancients concerning the number of angels on the head of a pin. We are neither quibblers nor casuists. In our all-embracing faith we believe infinitely more than we can ever neatly package into a cellophane creed. We outshine even those who frequently assert that their faith is quantitatively better than ours. We believe in more than a Trinity; three extensions of God's personality seem a paltry sum when compared to our belief that God is seen in all personality in varying degree.

Above all, we champion the right of seekers to carry on their search for truth and faith. We note, however, that an obvious question presents itself. How long must one seek? How long must one look for anything? Suppose one finds that which he is seeking? Must he then reject it and continue hunting for something still better?

The wise men, mind you, were laymen, not members of the clergy. They possessed something of that divine gift, common sense. They sought religious truth with the assumption that when its star shone before them, they need search no further. The birth story was written in retrospect by men who had seen the Star of Truth in the personality of Jesus. From heartfelt reverence and wilful loyalty to His Way, they dramatized a story of humble birth into a divinely blessed event. It was the poets' inspired gift, offered by those who had received, to Him Who had given supremely. The story portrays allegorically the glowing light of Jesus' personality and testifies in celestial terms to His impact upon not only those who knew Him personally, but upon all generations through the ages. Jesus belongs not only to the past and the present, but to the future as well. Under the divine light of faith the wise men, upon finding the answer to their spiritual needs, looked no further.

Jesus said, according to the gospel of Matthew, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field, which a man findeth and in his joy selleth all he hath and buyeth that field." But there are many who argue in favor of a never-ending search. Like the fallen angel, they, too, quote from the scriptures. Did not Jesus say, "Seek and ye shall find; ask and it shall be given you, knock and it shall be opened,"? Yes, but the inflection tells the story. The verb "seek" requires an object. What is its object? Is it not to find, to receive, or to enter into the kingdom of faith? Seeking is complemented only by finding, and this is symbolized by the Christmas story.

Having found a good Way of Life, a satisfying philosophy, or whatever one may call it, what should one do then? Shall we say, in the manner of children, "Finders keepers, losers weepers?" That is Brahminism, not Unitarian Christianity.

The Brahmin ego desires exclusive possession. The Brahmin church says "Let's open our doors to all, but not too widely." "We have the Truth, and the world will knock at our door." "We may have empty pews, but after all, we have quality, not quantity." "We must not advertise our faith, it is undignified." And the Brahmin prays "God, thank you that I am not like others." "We are the intellectual ones." Lifeless and loveless, Brahminism offers little hope of compassion. Brahminism must face squarely the parable of the Good Samaritan. We cannot wait for the beaten, wounded

aveler to stumble to our door. We ust help him where we find him on y highway of life.

Jesus provided an advanced step for ose graduated from the seeking to e finding stage in his directive to the sciples, "Go and preach the gospel the nations." He also said, "Ye are e light of the world; a city set on a ill cannot be hid," and "Ye are the lt of the earth, but if the salt hath st its savor it is thenceforth good for thing."

Brahmin Unitarianism, like savorless lt, offers nothing to the salvation of en, ethically or spiritually. It is ghtly only a stage in the evolution a free church.

It is difficult to present adequate- the platform of a religious fellow- ip to the satisfaction of all, but this uch bears witnessing: Unitarian hristianity, as the Unitarian Christian ellowship defines its religious objec- ve, is the antithesis of Brahminism.

Certainly, on this basis, it cannot be uated with religious reaction, turn- g back, and shutting out the future. esus' ethical and spiritual teachings ave never yet been fulfilled. That day e look forward to, and would do our st to hasten it. Nor does the Fellow- ip deserve the dubious honor bestow- l by its critics within the denomina- on that it is a pietist group. Did t Jesus decry those who "disfigured eir faces with much praying in the reets and in the synagogues?" And e try only to interpret His teachings ithout the confusing trappings of or- odox Christianity. How can one are a faith if he does not possess it? hough honest, effortful seeking is a rime Unitarian virtue, is it not logical assume that the finding is an even reater one, which is to be universally ared?

Dedicated to the task of pouring esh salt into a denomination which ust for humanity's sake be preserved, e Unitarian Christian Fellowship in- ites both earnest seekers and mag- animous finders.

THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

By Rev. Robert Brooks Day
Executive Director, Benevolent Fraternity of Unitarian Churches.

The spirit of Christmas is the spirit of good will. Envy, jealousy, pride and prejudice—all the common limitations of mankind—are put aside for a day and man accepts man for what he is, a brother. As men and women gather together all over this western world on Christmas morning, is it not strangely inspiring to consider how much kindness and good will will be spread abroad? And do we not experience an added thrill when we stop to reflect upon the heroic manner in which, century after century, other men and women have risen above themselves at this season of the year, and entered into the Christmas spirit? No one would instinctively choose this time of the year as the one most appropriate to such an expression of feeling. The ground is hard, the trees bare, the birds have long since flown. In the air is a bite which we have come after long experience to describe as "December chill." Sickness frequently makes this season the occasion of her visitation. Even death knocks not infrequently at people's doors. Very little there is here to suggest festivity, gladness, peace, good will! And yet man, age after age, has set aside this time of year for his winter festival, has appointed this season in spite of all its bleakness as the one best suited to an expression of the spirit of kindness and love. And to all this happiness and joy to this occasion of glad celebration, he has given the name of Christmas. The times and occasions of doubt in our lives are many—sometimes they lead to despair. The Christmas season is quite the opposite. It gives rise to faith and hope.

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

By Rev. Alexander P. Winston, Ph.D.
Minister First Parish Church, Portland, Maine

WHAT IS WORSHIP? It is a soul searching for its counterpart, fountain answering unto fountain, deep unto deep, as what is holiest in the self puts forth hopefully to find what is holy in the universe at large. What is worship? It is the song of the lark in a morning wet with dew: the pure, rapturous outpouring and overflow of happiness, a thanksgiving that bubbles and effervesces from the heart that is spontaneously glad. It is time flowing into eternity: it is a workman pausing to listen to a strain of music.

These are the pictures of man concentrating upon his God until his own being takes on more surely the kind of divinity which he adores. "O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until we rest in Thee," was the life-giving conviction of Augustine. Augustine knew what it was to turn away from God, even though in turning away he lived a life of intelligent moderation. His keen intellect was trained in philosophy, put to work professionally, in the teaching of what they then called "rhetoric." Augustine loved his mother yet he deserted her; he loved his common-law wife and child, yet he deserted them. The pagan world found him exactly to its pagan liking, but he himself sank deeper and deeper into a mire of futility. Away from God there was no hope, no sure haven for the questing genius of the man, no salvation from sin, suffering and death. Until he could worship sincerely, Augustine could do nothing, and yet as soon as his own will had been broken and his stubborn reticence melted away, so soon he found himself weeping and singing for sheer joy. "O God. Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until we rest in Thee."

The places that people are when they feel the immediacy of the divine differ markedly. In a way most extraordinary of all was Brother Lawrence, a simple unlettered fellow who spent much of his life as handy man in a monastery in Paris. For worship he needed neither cathedral nor sermon. Having first caught joy from a single tree that stood dry and leafless in midwinter, yet would dare to bud almost before the frost has gone from the gardens along the Seine, Brother Lawrence developed thereafter what he called the practice of the presence of God. This practice can be carried on anywhere he said, and God can be praised at any place and time. If we keep shop let it be to God's praise, if we buy or sell, practice law or medicine, care for the house, study or teach or build, let it be for God's praise. Brother Lawrence could wash dishes to the glory of God, sweep and run errands as though they were acts of praise. And of what use was this? Let me tell you, it made him one of the happiest men that ever lived. From the age of eighteen, when he first saw the providence of God working to leaf out a frozen, shrivelled tree, until his death at the ripe age of eighty, his life was a long hymn of praise such as the angels would seem to sing forever before the face of the Lord.

When we worship, things get back into the proper proportion. The big things once more are seen to be big and the little things are revealed in their littleness. Emerson believed that real wisdom consists in knowing what the centuries say to the hours. What worship does is to place us in the presence of eternal wisdom, so that we can more wisely know what to do with the hours as they go by. What man who

as worshipped regularly in a church
ke ours could devote his time chiefly
gambling, drunkenness and crime?
he centuries condemn that abuse of
e hours. What man, who has sin-
rely sought God and searched his
vn conscience, could treat other men
mere tools, instruments of his will,
be raised up or cast off whenever
chose? Worship makes persons big
d profits small, helpfulness big and
mbition small, work big and ease
all, loyalty big and selfishness small,
e soul big and the body small, love
g and power small. Very likely the
eater part of wisdom is simply to
t things in the proper proportion.

The result is a happy life. Some-
here in the darker side of our Puri-
n past the idea grew up that we
re not supposed to enjoy life too
ch, that it was positively sinful to
ke too great a satisfaction in it. I
uld be diametrically opposite in my
inion; the holy life is the only happy
, the only exhalted, elevated, en-
tured life. If you looked into a
at chasm cut deep in the earth by
river's ceaseless flow, such as the
and Canyon of the Colorado or that
the fiercely rushing Yellowstone,
u might see an eagle soar on motion-
s wings from the canyon's narrow
or right up to the breathless verge
ere you have taken your stand.
arm air currents bear him up, float-
effortless, sustained and uplifted
a power mysteriously vaster than
beating of even his iron pinions.
think of Isaiah: "They that wait
on the Lord shall mount up with
gs as eagles." So, you may be
e, the life of worship bears you up
d keeps you ever-moving on an up-
rd level.

Most people would admit that the
od life is good, yet would be less
dy to agree that it is also fun. Now
s is exactly what I wish to maintain.
praise God with the whole heart
a way of blessing and affirming all
ation, a way of saying that life is
od beyond our small measure to un-
rstand, but that even our tiny sips
of its nectar fill us with a mighty im-
pulse to thanksgiving. Religion was
meant to be enjoyed, with a joy so
high, so sustained, that it can burn
equally brightly at eighty and eight-
een, as we saw in the case of Brother
Lawrence. This combination of wor-
ship and happiness is expressed in the
most Puritanical document of the som-
ber Puritans: "The chief end of man,"
says the Westminister Confession, "is
to glorify God and **enjoy** Him for-
ever."

CINEMA MINDED

Rev. Paul Harmon Chapman

With the advent of 16mm movie projec-
tors, religious film libraries were developed
from available silent and sound films. Over
forty years ago, in my father's church, I
had witnessed the projection of films in
their infancy.

My father was a cinema minded min-
ister. He experimented with the use of films
for knitting together the fellowship of his
church but hardly anything of educational
value secular or religious, emerged from
his efforts. Motion picture projection was
then in its infancy foreshadowing however
the advent of 16mm projection of better
films.

The so called "better films" consisted of
religious films of the type illustrated by the
silent version of **King of Kings** later to be
reentitled, **I am The Way.** I have found,
in using these for churches I have served,
that they were far too literalistic and over-
ly dramatic. Lacking any sense of realism
and quality either in production or content
these films failed to encourage cinema
mindedness among church groups.

Available film libraries, developed to meet
a growing need, fell short of arousing in-
terest and enthusiasm among church lead-
ers primarily because they too were inad-
equate in quality and insufficient in quan-
tity. It was not until the production of
Cathedral Films under the direction of a
progressive Protestant clergyman working
in conjunction with Hollywood studios that
churches pricked attentive ears.

A reader of The Unitarian Alliance rec-
ommends the following Cathedral films on
the basis of experimentation in his church:
**A Certain Nobleman, Who Is My Neighbor, No Greater Power, Journey Into Faith, The Story Of The Prodigal Son, Man of Faith, Child of Bethlehem, A Woman To Remem-
ber.** These, he describes as "high in sound
and projective quality, instructional and
inspirational." From personal experience I
would add to this list the titles, **Queen
Esther, Simon Peter, and Amos.**

Fortunately study guides for Cathedral
films are available as teaching aids. A
mere showing is not enough; one must
prepare children for what they are about
to see. A film without preparation and
discussion does not meet the educational
needs of our church schools where the
purpose is not "to entertain" but to teach.

HOW CHRISTMAS CAME

By Rev. Carl Bihldorff
Minister First Parish in Brookline, Mass.

What is Christmas? Historically, it is the day when the birth of Jesus is celebrated. Religiously, it is a day which commemorates the event—the coming into the world of a life so divine that the ages have called him the Son of God. But when all this is said and acknowledged we have explained almost nothing. Jesus did appear. But why?

I am convinced that Christmas holds in its mystery much more than our orthodox friends have seen. To them it stands for the advent of a saviour, God's only begotten son, sent to earth to redeem mankind. To us, if we will but open our minds to wisdom, Christmas can reveal answers to some of life's deepest questions and guide our souls in the way of their fulfilment.

Today we honor the birth of Jesus of Nazareth because of what he was, what he stood for, what he revealed. His God was no nebulous thing. He was a Father, the loving Father of all mankind. Youthful agnosticism may have clouded some of his days, but he obviously refused to let his search end with a question mark. We may attribute to him a quality of intuition, spiritual awareness, prescient knowledge, divine affinity. Whatever conclusion we reach, we cannot escape his conclusion: God is our Father, and we are his children.

In raising the question, How Christmas Came, I find a parallel between Copernicus and Jesus. The Polish monk is honored because he revealed a fact about the earth's relation to the sun which has been confirmed by other men of astronomy. Jesus is honored at this holy season because his revelation of the love of God and man's divinity have been confirmed in the spiritual experience of the race. I do not mean, that all men have had personal confirmation of his insights. Few of us, intelligent as we are, would be capable of deducing from a study of the heavenly bodies, proof that the earth goes round the sun. We accept this as a fact because of our confidence in astronomers whose observations and mathematical skill have confirmed this conclusion. In the same manner, when ordinary mortals seek confirmation of the insights of one who the brilliant scientist, the late Lecomte du Nouy, said was perhaps a million years in advance of evolution, their search is rarely confirmed through the witness of first hand knowledge.

The simple truth is that most human beings lack the capacity to verify Jesus' insights. This does not mean that all of us are incapable of such development as will lead to confirmation; it means simply that we have not trained ourselves through spiritual discipline to be worthy instruments of such knowledge.

Shall we, out of our own spiritual ineptitude, presume to judge the validity of experiences shared by such giants as Jesus, Paul, Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint Francis, Saint Catherine, Meister Eckhart and a great host of others—past and present—who so lived in attunement with things heavenly that out of their lives came pronouncements which are the glory of our religious heritage?

The spirit moves me to say—distrust your doubts! Open your lives through the power of faith and share this Christmastide the vision and the promise of God's holy love which were revealed in Jesus and in other Christlike lives. Their ecstasy few if any among us have earned the right to share, but through faith, we can know some measure of the love and peace that dwelt in them.

CHRISTMAS

We do not know when the birth of sus was first celebrated in Christian story. One theory suggests it was served during the reign of Antoni- is Pius—138 to 161 A. D.—but this eory has been discredited. It is prob- le that the nativity of the Christ ild did not become a part of our clesiastical calendar until the third ntury.

The thought I am suggesting is that hen enough men and women had rified the truth of Jesus' witness to e power of God's love in human life, hristmas was born. It took the collec- ve testimony of generations of seek- s to confirm the validity of his reve- tion. I do not believe we can ade- ately explain How Christmas Came ithout acknowledging our debt to is period of trial, evaluation and con- mation.

A further explanation of How Christ- as Came must be presented, for we us far have said nothing of that hich preceded, or paved the way, for e coming of Christmas. Had the spir- that was in Jesus been shared among people other than the Hebrews, there uld today be no Christmas. For out- e of Palestine there existed no spir- al climate that could have brought fruition the promise of his thought d revelation. At the time of Jesus' rth, Judaism was the only religion in e world that possessed the capacity and that by a very narrow margin safety—to preserve for mankind his ssage. Christmas came because Jesus s born into the richest spiritual cul- re of the ancient world. Abraham d Moses had laid the foundation. aiah, Jeremiah, the Psalmist, Amos, icah and Hosea completed the temple which the voice of the Lord's nointed could be heard. Nearly two ousand years of preparation preced- his advent. May we never forget r debt to Judaism.

We cannot, however, stop here. If did, we would be confronted with interpretation of Christmas that is manistic in its origin, and earthy in content. We must go deeper; much eper.

Behind the fact of Christmas stands that which is its supreme glory. "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." Christmas is more than a revelation about God. God broke into the world at Christmas time. Although Jesus was not God, any more than our radios are the creators of melodies they bring to us, through attunement to the divine spirit, he revealed to us according to his capacity and sensitivity, and he enhanced for us through his human spirit, the wonder, the glory, and the love of God.

In Albert Schweitzer's book, Christianity and the Religions of the World. there stands one of the most illuminating expressions of philosophic wisdom I have ever known. Doctor Schweitzer, mindful of the mystery that attends any discussion of God's reality and purpose, and aware of the paradoxes that nature's laws and divine love present, tried to bridge the impasse in these words. He wrote: "Let me express in a simile. There is an ocean—cold water without motion. In the ocean, is the Gulf Stream, flowing from the Equator to the Pole. Inquire of all scientists how it is physically imaginable that a stream of hot water flows between the waters of the ocean which, so to speak, form its banks, the moving within the motionless, the hot within the cold; no scientist can explain it. Similarly, there is the God of love, within the God of the forces of the universe—one with Him, and yet so totally different. We let ourselves be seized and carried away by that vital stream."

The deepest answer to How Christmas Came is here expressed. Jesus let the stream of God's love seize and carry him away, and in so doing he became the Christ of history.

Christmas has come. Jesus' revelation is a fact. He would desire nothing more of us than that we, too, may master his art and let the stream of God's love make us Christlike.

"MYSTERY OF LIFE"

By Rev. Preston Bradley, D. D.
Minister, People's Church of Chicago
(Reprint from "The Liberalist")

Mystery of life! Is it any wonder that in man's effort to rationalize the universe of which he is part, he finally comes to a stone wall with a question mark on it? One of the greatest scientists that has been produced—a great scientific mind, in these last few years has said: "We scientists go on and on and on from hypothesis to experimentation; from experimentation to verification, and then back and forth we go but always at the end—the question mark! Because that question mark is always there, need that create any despair in the heart and mind of man? No, because there is an explanation to the mystery of life; there is a penetration beyond the question mark which the sensitive, spiritual soul can experience, in spite of what the brutality of the materialistic world can do to one; in spite of the strain and pressure of economic necessities of life; the necessity for food, clothing, a roof over our heads. However, as long as we have food, comfort, a satisfaction of the materialistic, the important truths are neglected; and men eat, drink, laugh and live as though that were the fulfillment of life. Yet even to them there come moments of awakening — moments when they will be stabbed by the consciousness of the sweet mystery of life, which becomes such a dominating imperative that one is like a little child lost in the crowd. So the heart of man, in the great crowded ways of the world's life, with the marts of trade all about him everywhere, his ears attuned to the jingling of money, with all the pressure and all the objectivity, all the materialism of navies and bombs and guns, boundaries, soldiers and statesmen—the heart of man cries out,—for the need and depth of the human soul cries out for sustenance that nothing in the material world can give. No wonder he cannot stand to go through life to the very end without something which suggests to him a higher altitude than he has ever known. The lights go out, bitterness comes, memory stalks, and unkindness and cruelty have done their worst, and all of the world has battered, pummeled, and pounded man into a jelly-like mass of blood and bone and hair—then man cries back to the childhood of the race—"I want the answer!"

I think of all the superficial aspects of life, the colossal waste of our finest energy in the things that do not matter. I think of all of this emphasis of food and drink, gambling and lust, and the things that tear the soul of man apart, are bringing man to the point where he is ready to cry like a little chid—"I have lost my way!" And there is no more agonizing glint in the eye of either beast or man than when they are lost. Nothing awakens my pity more, as I go about the city's streets, than to see a beautiful animal, someone's dog, with the chain snapped, and that bewildered animal trying to dodge traffic. You reach out your hand and it will turn away. Lost! To be astray on a city's street is tragedy supreme in all the animal world. A dog, looking for someone it has loved and lost; that's tragedy. Man, squandering, buying, building—pride, bigness, power—poor, simple man, lost from someone who loved him. No wonder the poet-lyricist could write, "Ah, sweet mystery of life; for it is love and love alone that rules the world."

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APPLICATION

Unitarian Christian Fellowship

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